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China Silent on Reported Defection of Intelligence Official

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PEKING, Sept. 3—China's Foreign Ministry today declined to comment on the reported defection to the West of a high-ranking Chinese intelligence officer. A Foreign Ministry spokesman said that it was beyond the ministry's competence to answer questions dealing with such a matter.

The ministry's silence on the reported defection led some observers to believe that there is substance to French and Japanese news agency reports that an intelligence officer named Yu San, or Yu Zhensan, fled to the West in January.

Agence France-Presse (AFP) and Kyodo news service, in reports Monday, described Yu as director of foreign affairs for the State Security Ministry, a secretive organization responsible for surveillance of foreigners, counterespionage and gathering overseas intelligence.

The ministry appears to be organized along the lines of the Soviet Union's Committee for State Security, or KGB. But much less is known about the Chinese ministry than about the KGB.

Neither AFP nor Kyodo, which issued the first reports on Yu, claimed to know why he had defected.

AFP described Yu as a man in his late 30s who is the son of veteran revolutionaries. The report said his precise whereabouts in the West were apparently unknown.

One report said that he went to Taiwan, but government officials there denied any knowledge of his defection. Taiwan is usually eager to publicize major defections.

There was speculation here that a western government had decided not to publicize Yu's defection to avoid embarrassing China. There was also speculation that Yu may have been linked to the case of Larry Wu-tai Chin, a Chinese-born American citizen and former CIA analyst who was charged in November of last year with spying for China.

At his trial, Chin said that a Chinese defector had informed the

American authorities about his spying. The question being asked here is whether it was Yu who tipped off the Americans to Chin's career as a spy and then fled to the West.

Chin committed suicide in February after being convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment.

China's Foreign Ministry denied the American allegations that Chin had been spying for China.

At a regular Foreign Ministry press briefing today, reporters asked a number of questions about the two reports on Yu's defection. Foreign Ministry spokesman Li Zhaoxing said he was not aware of any such defection but stopped short of issuing an outright denial of the agencies' reports.

Li then said he could speak only for the Foreign Ministry and could not comment on intelligence matters.

A reporter pointed out that when the Chin case arose, the Foreign Ministry did appear to be capable of commenting on an intelligence matter and issued a denial that Chin had worked for China.

Another reporter, a relative newcomer to Peking, asked the spokesman, "What does the State Security Ministry do and how does it operate?"

The spokesman replied, "Since you have not been here long, it means that you are a new correspondent to Beijing [Peking], and we'd like to extend our welcome to you to work here in Beijing. So far as the explanation of the work and procedures of another ministry are concerned, I'm afraid to say it is not part of my job."